CALIFORNIA WILDLIFE HABITAT RELATIONSHIPS SYSTEM
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B357   Chestnut-backed Chickadee   Poecile rufescens
Family: Paridae Order: Passeriformes Class: Aves

Written by: M. Green
Reviewed by: L. Mewaldt, D. Airola
Edited by: R. Duke, D. Winkler

DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

   Common to abundant throughout most of its range; but rare and local at eastern and
southern limits. Ranges inland from north coast area into Siskiyou and Trinity cos. and
extends down western slope of the Sierra Nevada to Madera Co., where it is rare. Range
extends along north coast area to Lake and Solano cos., then tapering toward the coast from
Contra Costa Co. south to Santa Barbara Co. Prefers closed-cone pine-cypress, Douglas-fir,
and redwood habitats, but often found in riparian, hardwood, and other habitats (Grinnell and
Miller 1944, Crase 1976, McCaskie et al. 1979).

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

  Feeding: Gleans insects and spiders from foliage, twigs, and branches of trees, especially
conifers; eats some conifer seeds and fruits especially in fall and winter. Feeds mostly in
middle and upper canopy levels (Airola and Barrett 1985).

  Cover: Cover provided by trees and shrubs in humid forests of the coast and mixed
forests of the western Sierra Nevada. Frequents closed-cone pine-cypress, redwood,
riparian, and Douglas-fir habitats. Also, regularly found in moist hardwood habitats.

  Reproduction: Builds nest of moss with cup of fur, hair, feathers, plant fibers (Harrison
1978); usually in old woodpecker hole, or excavates own cavity in decaying wood. Nest
height usually less than 3 m (10 ft), but has been found up to 24 m (80 ft) (Bent 1946).
Readily uses nest boxes.

  Water: Bathes and drinks occasionally.

  Pattern: Frequents conifer habitats, especially those with oaks, maples, and other
hardwoods. Also feeds regularly in alders, willows, and other riparian vegetation.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

  Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

  Seasonal Movements/Migration: A yearlong resident in California; appears to wander very
little. Existence on the western slope of Sierra Nevada results from a recent, major range
expansion (Crase 1976).

  Home Range: Apparently smaller in summer.

  Territory: Hertz et al. (1976) reported a mean breeding territory of 1.3 ha (3.3 ac) (N = 2)
in an oak woodland in San Mateo Co.

Reproduction: Breeds from mid-March into July; peak in May and June. Lays 5-9 eggs; average 6-7 (Bent 1946). Altricial young cared for by both parents (Harrison 1978).

Niche: Subject to same predators as other small, forest-dwelling passerines: adults to predation from accipiters, and eggs and nestlings to predation from small mammals, snakes, and corvids. May join flocks of mixed species in winter and forage beyond summer home range (Airola and Barrett 1985).

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